

# VA HIV Testing Information for Health Care Providers

Fact Sheet | June 2011

[www.hiv.va.gov](http://www.hiv.va.gov)

## Why is HIV testing so important?

- > Early diagnosis of HIV is associated with greatly improved medical outcomes. In addition, a patient's knowledge of his or her HIV status may substantially reduce his or her risk of transmitting the virus.
- > VHA is the largest single provider of HIV care in the United States, providing care to more than 24,000 Veterans with HIV in 2010. **Yet, less than 15 percent of Veterans in VA care have been tested for HIV.**
- > Our goal is to diagnose HIV infection as soon as possible so that Veterans can receive the excellent care provided by VHA and remain healthy for many years to come.



## What is VA's policy on HIV testing?

- > VA HIV testing for patients is voluntary and confidential.
- > As of August 2009, VA no longer requires either written consent or scripted pre/post test counseling.
- > The new VA policy allows Veterans to provide verbal consent. Prior to giving consent, patients must be provided with educational materials and given the opportunity to have any questions answered.



## Which patients should be tested for HIV? How often?

- > In line with current CDC recommendations, HIV testing should be part of routine medical care for everyone; this includes **all** Veterans. Any patient without documentation of an HIV test in his or her health record should be offered a test.
- > We encourage all Veterans to get tested at least once.
- > Patients documented to be HIV negative but who have ongoing risk factors should be offered an HIV test at least annually.



## Whose responsibility is it to test patients for HIV?

- > VA encourages **all** providers (especially those in primary care, mental health, and substance abuse clinics) to routinely offer HIV testing to all of their patients.

## Where can I find more information?

- > [www.hiv.va.gov](http://www.hiv.va.gov) (*Internet*)
- > [vaww.hiv.va.gov](http://vaww.hiv.va.gov) (*intranet—for VA staff only*)